

SUMMARY

Description of the Proposed Action

The proposed action is to improve United States Highway 2 (US 2) from the junction of US 85, located north of Williston, to the junction of US 52, located northwest of Minot (Figure S-1). The proposed project is approximately 100 miles long and crosses portions of Williams, Mountrail, and Ward Counties in northwestern North Dakota. This segment of US 2 is currently a two-lane roadway with a posted speed limit of 65 miles per hour. The proposed action provides a divided four-lane highway along the entire 100-mile segment.

The purpose of the proposed US 2 reconstruction project is to improve safety, enhance system performance, and improve system continuity. The proposed project is needed to address safety problems resulting from roadway deficiencies, frequent turning movements, a higher percentage of truck traffic, and an aging driver population. Significant additional safety concerns stem from the conflict between traffic traveling at high speeds and traffic traveling at much slower speeds, such as military convoys and large, slow-moving agricultural machinery. The proposed project is needed to support the increasing transportation needs resulting from changes in the economy and ongoing economic development initiatives. Population loss in smaller towns has forced many residents to travel longer distances to obtain basic services and employment opportunities. The project area is also experiencing consolidation of grain elevator, diversification of crops, and increased use of irrigation, which are all factors associated with increased use of trucks to transport agricultural products to market. Additionally, improvements to US 2 are necessary to allow the roadway to function properly as part of the Interregional System of roads under NDDOT's Highway Performance Classification System. These improvements are consistent with the Statewide Transportation Plan, and the project is listed in the approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Other Major Federal Actions

No other major federal actions for the US 2 project area are presently known.

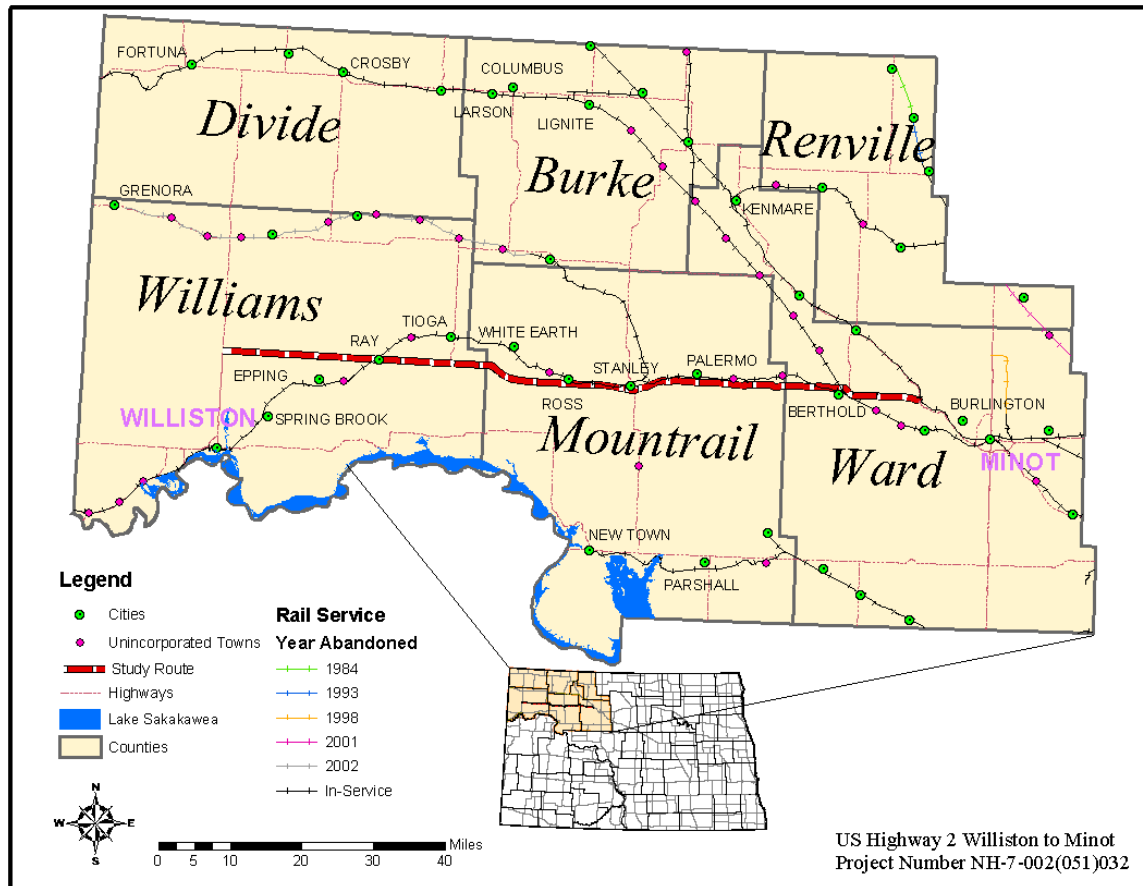
Alternatives Identified for the US 2 Project

In addition to the No-Action Alternative, four build alternatives were considered reasonable and were selected for more detailed environmental analysis. The four alternatives include the following:

- South Alignment Alternative which consists of providing a divided four-lane highway by constructing a new roadway (two-lane with a 70-miles-per-hour [mph] design speed) south of and parallel to the existing roadway.
- North Alignment Alternative, which consists of providing a divided four-lane highway by constructing a new roadway (two-lane with a 70-mph design speed) north of and parallel to the existing roadway.
- Selective North-South Alignment Alternative (preferred), which consists of selectively constructing two lanes parallel and to the north or south of the existing roadway to avoid industrial facilities, homes, business, farms and other structures. The preferred alternative also avoids and minimizes environmental impacts.
- Complete Reconstruction Alternative, which consists of obliterating the existing roadway and centering the new roadways within the existing right of way (ROW).

The No-Action Alternative or No-Build Alternative would maintain US 2 as a two-lane highway as it exists today. Improvements to the existing roadway would be limited to resurfacing-type activities consisting of bituminous overlays and pavement repairs that extend the service life of the highway by providing additional structural capacity.

Figure S-1. Project Location Map



Summary of Major Environmental Impacts

The impacts of the build alternatives include social, economic, and environmental effects. Wetlands and trees (upland forests and windbreaks) are considered to be the major environmental impacts related to the project. Table S-1 summarizes the wetland and tree impacts by alternative. The Selective North-South Alignment was selected as the preferred alternative because it avoids and minimizes environmental impacts in the area.

The proposed action will be beneficial to the social and economic viability of the northwestern region of North Dakota. The proposed improvements to US 2 will provide a safe, predictable, consistent, and reliable highway for the business consumer as well as the actual movement of people and goods to and through the northwestern part of the

state. Improving the US 2 corridor will support initiatives in the northwest part of the state to diversify its horizons regarding the type of industries and development that will locate and expand in the area.

Table S-1

Environmental Impacts for the US 2 Alternatives

Element Impacted	Alternative				
	South Alignment	North Alignment	Selective North-South Alignment ¹	Complete Reconstruction	No Action
Wetlands (acres)					
Easement Wetlands	0.81	3.11	0.00	0.40	0
Jurisdictional Wetlands	6.97	7.22	6.97	8.53	0
Other Wetlands	71.72	64.82	72.87	78.99	0
Total Wetland Impacts	79.50	75.15	79.84	87.92	0
Trees (acres)					
Upland Forests	14.0	19.0	13.9	14.0	0
Windbreaks	18.2	37.6	18.5	18.1	0

¹Preferred alternative

Areas of Controversy

One area of potential conflict is the elimination of no-mow or managed-mow areas on the right of way adjacent to highways under the jurisdiction of NDDOT. NDDOT is in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding with interested agencies to provide for the elimination of managed-mow, by replacing the managed-mow areas with land that has value for wildlife and provides public access.

Another area of controversy is the potential impact the project may have on wetlands. The Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers have expressed concern with wetland impacts, particularly jurisdictional wetlands. Efforts have been made to avoid and minimize the impacts on wetlands. NDDOT will continue to work

with resource agencies to develop a plan to ensure that unavoidable wetland impacts will be mitigated on at least an acre-per-acre basis.

Unresolved Issues with Other Agencies

NDDOT, FHWA, USFWS, and NDGFD have agreed on and are finalizing the implementation plan and the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for transferring the areas of the managed-mow mitigation program. The plan includes provisions to ensure that previous environmental commitments, including those made in the 1976 FEIS covering improvements to US 2, will be satisfied. The implementation plan will be finalized, and the MOA will be approved and signed by all agencies prior to start of construction.

Federal Actions

Federal permits, some of which are administered by state agencies, are required for certain aspects of the build alternatives. The required permits and responsible agencies include:

- Section 404 Permit – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)
- Floodplain Management Permit – North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC)
- Section 401 Certification and National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NDPDES) Permit – North Dakota Department of Health (NDDH)